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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/15/2017

TAGS: PBTS PHSA SCUL SP UK CA ECON

SUBJECT: SPAIN DETAINS ODYSSEY EXPLORER IN DISPUTED
INTERNATIONAL WATERS

REF: STATE 13877 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES HUGO LLORENS FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) The Bahamian-flagged Odyssey Explorer sailed out of Gibraltar at 9:38 am local time the morning of October 16 and was immediately approached by the Spanish Navy and the Guardia Civil approximately 3.5 nautical miles south of Gibraltar in disputed waters. The Spanish authorities detained the vessel and forcibly escorted it to the port of Algeciras where it remains docked. We have received preliminary indications that at 6:50 pm local time, the Amcit master of the ship, Vorus Sterling, was arrested (septel to report more). Embassy officials have been in contact with the GoS to confirm the potential arrest as well as the charges.

¶2. (C) After being escorted to port, Odyssey initially refused Spanish officials permission to board the ship. GOS officials eventually forcibly boarded the vessel. Media reports indicate that there were representatives from various local and international press agencies on board throughout this process.

¶3. (C) The vessel's detention occurred at the same time EUR Assistant Secretary Fried and the Charge were meeting with the MFA's Director General for European and North American Affairs, Jose "Pepe" Pons, on OSCE matters. In a pull-aside following the meeting, Pons disclosed to the Charge that the Odyssey vessel had just been detained and would be searched at Algeciras. The Charge asked Pons to share any information about Americans that might be on board as soon as possible. The Charge reiterated prior requests that any American on board be treated fairly and that should there be an Amcit arrest, the Embassy be notified immediately so that it could fulfill its consular obligations. Pons agreed to do so. EconOff followed up with MFA's Deputy Director for North American Affairs to repeat the request.
LLORENS